

# ASSESSING SERVANT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AMONG STUDENT EMPLOYEES THROUGH A CHALLENGE COURSE APPRENTICESHIP

by

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In today's system of higher education, administrators are committed to developing students into leaders (Bush, 2009). One area for leadership development is during non-curricular programming that is typically offered by a university's Division of Student Affairs. A Division of Student Affairs, the administrative division which oversees campus recreation has the opportunity to work with students through sports, fitness, adventure trips, and challenge course facilitation. The current study examined servant leadership skills among students who engaged in one university's challenge course facilitator training program, which served as an apprenticeship. This training has an intentional focus on leadership development. A semi-structured interview was performed with each student (N=14) enrolled in the apprenticeship. Meetings were held at or near the completion of the apprenticeship, which allowed study participants to reflect on personal growth through the training program. Results illustrated that servant leadership development was perceived as a major outcome by the challenge course student facilitators after the students completed the apprenticeship. The student informants shared examples of how they planned to take what they had learned through the apprenticeship program and apply it to other parts of their lives. Implications for improving the challenge course facilitator training and for future research are discussed.



ASSESSING SERVANT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AMONG  
STUDENT EMPLOYEES THROUGH A CHALLENGE COURSE APPRENTICESHIP

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Science in

Recreation and Park Administration

by

Stephen Tucci

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## **Section I: Manuscript**

### **Introduction**

Higher education in the United States focuses on developing students both inside and outside of the classroom (Dugan & Komives, 2010). The Division of Student Affairs on many campuses is uniquely positioned to develop students through non-curricular offerings. The Division of Student Affairs has responsibility for campus services such as university unions, student housing and dining, student transportation, and campus recreation. Through these entities, a university's mission, goals, and values can be reinforced. To achieve this strategic alignment with the broader goals of a university, student affairs professionals must design intentional programs. Intentional programs include non-curricular offerings for students that students enjoy and allow for specific developmental outcomes to be met.

A developmental outcome of growing interest is leadership development among college students. Many universities have invested a great deal of time, money, and personnel in developing programs focused directly or indirectly on leadership (Bush, 2009). Some institutions have incorporated leadership development within their strategic plan for the entire university (Dugan & Komives, 2010).

Leadership can be defined in many ways, and there are multiple theories describing how to become an effective leader. One approach, servant leadership, offers an ideal framework for college student development. Servant leadership is a framework that is predicated on the assumption that a leader should put the needs of others first before his/her needs (Crippen, 2006). It follows once the servant leader understands the needs of others they can effectively communicate and work with the group to accomplish goals.

At one public university, challenge course and team training has been identified as an

opportunity to develop servant leadership among student employees. The campus recreation professional who hires and trains challenge course facilitators identified student development as the basis for the design of the apprenticeship. After reviewing the training program, the researcher determined that the essential elements of the servant leadership theory describe the responsibilities of challenge course facilitators. Simply put, a facilitator's job is to understand what each group wants to accomplish when they go through a program. Then, the facilitator uses their knowledge and skill set to help the group meet those intentions. Through this process the student challenge course facilitator must have the characteristics of servant leadership: (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) stewardship, (9) commitment to the growth of others, and (10) building community (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

Literature supports the assertion that participation in challenge course can result in specific outcomes among participants. For example, challenge course participation has been linked to group cohesion, group effectiveness, and leadership development for participants involved in a challenge course (Flood, Gardner, & Cooper, 2009; Gillis & Speelman, 2008; Glass & Benshoff, 2002; Goltz & Hietpolo, 2006; Hatch & McCarthy, 2005; Odello, Hill & Gomez, 2008; Smith, Strand & Bunting, 2006; Wolfe & Dattilo, 2006). However, research has not addressed how leadership may be developed through challenge course *facilitation*. The researcher attempts to understand if an intentionally designed challenge course apprenticeship training program develops characteristics of servant leadership among student employees enrolled in program.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine servant leadership development among

students employed by a campus recreation department who go through an apprenticeship program to become a challenge course facilitator.

## **Literature Review**

Many different theories of leadership exist: transactional, transformational, and situational are a few examples. There are also many different points of view about leadership models, styles, and development. The researcher chose to examine servant leadership. After conducting the semi-structured interviews, the researcher identified the responsibilities of a challenge course facilitator coincide with key concepts of servant leadership.

**Servant leadership theory.** The theory of servant leadership is a philosophy about working with individuals in a variety of capacities (e.g., work) (Greenleaf, 1982). Servant leadership is not about directing individuals or telling them what to do. Rather, Greenleaf (1982) viewed the theory as a collaborative process. Servant leadership has been examined in a variety of settings: nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, and educational settings, to name a few (Greenleaf, 2002). Greenleaf (1982) indicated the servant leadership theory attempts to explain the role of a leader in enriching the lives of individuals, building organizations, and creating a better future for society. A servant leader can help bring about these changes and attempts to focus on the well-being of the people they are working with (Greenleaf, 1972).

Greenleaf (1972) recognized that individuals have the potential to become servant leaders. The application of servant leadership theory has two intentions (Greenleaf, 1982). The first intention is to develop the servant leader as a result of his/her practice of the theory and the second is to develop growth in the individuals who are being served. Greenleaf (2002) formulated servant leadership around the concept “to serve and be served by”. This allows leaders and followers to have a mutually beneficial relationship. From his work, many

components of servant leadership emerged that distinguished it from other types of leadership.

First, the needs of individuals connected with the servant leader are of the utmost importance. The servant leader will identify those needs and use their resources, training, and skills to help individuals achieve goals they have set (Hawkins, 2009). The servant leader will build relationships with these individuals to accomplish this. Every person will feel involved as an important part of the process of goal attainment.

Another component of servant leadership that Greenleaf (1998) discussed was vision. Greenleaf asserted that vision was lacking in other models of leadership. Greenleaf was concerned many institutions did not look beyond their current situation. To him, it was important to look beyond today at how a better tomorrow could be created and maintained.

Other key components of the servant leadership model are teaching and mentoring (Waterman, 2011). These actions relate to the long-term approach of the servant leadership model, which can motivate individuals to go beyond self-interests for the good of the group (Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson & Jinks, 2007). As such, an assumption underlying Servant Leadership is that by putting others first, the leader will make beneficial changes personally, as well as create an opportunity for change with all individuals involved.

Greenleaf (1998) recognized the importance of servant leadership in higher education. For many years, he proposed that higher education administrators should make a more dedicated effort in developing servant leadership qualities among students. He felt to create a better future for society, servant leadership practices needed to be taught to individuals during their most critical development of being a young adult (Greenleaf, 1998).

As a servant leader, individuals are expected to exhibit certain characteristics to achieve effective results. Spears and Lawrence (2002) suggested ten characteristics to describe servant

leaders. The characteristics include (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) stewardship, (9) commitment to the growth of others, and (10) building community. The acquisition of these ten skills indicates it takes a variety of skills to be a servant leader.

The first characteristic is the ability to listen. Putting others first requires the servant leader to listen and understand what the person truly means when they are talking and working on the task at hand. The second characteristic is the ability to empathize with others. Servant leaders need to be able to accept and recognize individual's drives, feelings, and ideas to motivate and encourage team members.

The third characteristic is the ability to offer healing. The ability to heal individuals directly relates to listening to their needs and acknowledging them, making the team members feel understood, appreciated, and needed. The fourth characteristic is the ability to be self-aware. Self-awareness and reflection allow leaders to know ethics and values as well as how to react when tested.

The fifth characteristic is the ability to build community. Servant leaders attempt to make others aware of their purpose, actions, and the consequences of those actions. For example, an organization that is influenced by the servant leadership model uses persuasion instead of coercion to accomplish goals. The sixth characteristic is the ability to conceptualize "what might be". This is the ability to articulate a vision for the future in all that it could entail.

The seventh characteristic is the ability to foresee and minimize issues. Foresight resembles conceptualization, except it tries to articulate and minimizes problems before they happen. The eighth characteristic is the ability to be a good steward. Servant leaders are accountable for the well-being of the group as they hold themselves and the organization to a

higher standard than the status quo.

The ninth characteristic is commitment to the growth of others. Servant leaders strive to develop individuals. The tenth and final characteristic is the ability to build community. Servant leaders contribute to the common good by encouraging others to do the same.

**Servant leadership outcomes.** While much of the writing around servant leadership focuses on operationalizing the characteristics of a servant leader, a few studies have investigated outcomes associated with servant leadership. Jaramillio, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts (2009) examined the relationship of servant leadership practices of managers and their influence on their sales teams from a range of industries. Using an online survey, responses were collected from a total of 501 full time salespersons who rated their own efficacy on seven dimensions of servant leadership. Findings indicated that that senior managers who had similar characteristics to these servant leadership principles effectively communicated with their subordinates. This led to more effective and engaged workers. The researchers concluded that managers who integrated servant leadership principles into their organizations typically had higher sales for the company. This was accomplished by creating a workforce that focuses on the needs of customers, and creating higher levels of well-being among the sales professionals.

Whereas Jaramillio et al. (2009) focused on full-time sales professionals, Robinson (2009) sought to understand the servant leadership theory and its relationship with the methods of teaching nursing. Robinson (2009) compared the ten characteristics of leadership developed by Spears and Lawrence (2002) to the application of teaching in nursing. Results indicated there was a negative impression of the attributes of servant leadership among nursing professionals; they felt servant leadership principles lead to being viewed as a “doormat” and lacked self-respect. To counteract this thought process, the researcher suggested the servant leadership



theory be viewed as empowering. Robinson (2009) suggested current nursing professionals should review strategies of organizations that implemented servant leadership because it would be beneficial to the teaching of nursing professionals.

Also, looking at outcomes, Chung, Jung, Kyle, and Petrick (2010) explored the antecedents of job satisfaction of full time U.S. National Park Service employees who were servant leaders. The researchers hypothesized that trust in the leader and leader support would bring about procedural justice. Procedural justice was the perception of what the employees thought was fair job treatment from supervisors (Chung et. al, 2010). The researchers found that a combination of trust in leader, leaders support, and procedural justice enhanced job satisfaction among the more than 220,000 respondents.

**Assessing servant leadership characteristics.** The literature examining servant leadership has been hampered in part by the lack of a standardized measure of servant leadership. According to Spears (1998), the creation of an instrument to measure servant leadership attributes has not been standardized because there is a fear among researchers that operationalizing it runs the risk of demeaning the value of the theory. Furthermore, servant leadership can be interpreted in many different ways (i.e., differing numbers of dimensions). Servant leadership has resisted standardization. For instance, Graham (1991) categorized servant leadership fits in four classifications, Spears and Lawrence (2002) identified servant leadership using ten characteristics, and Barbuto and Wheeler (2002) recognized servant leadership utilizing eleven characteristics. Regardless of the how servant leadership was classified, there was still attempts to create an instrument to measure servant leadership development.

After identifying key characteristics of servant leadership, Page and Wong (2000) developed a conceptual framework for measuring servant leadership. They created a quantitative

self-assessment of servant leadership, which could be used in different settings. Based on the Campbell Leadership Index, Page and Wong (2000) generated 100 one sentence descriptors of the servant leadership theory. The researchers created twelve distinct categories (integrity, humility, servanthood, caring for others, empowering others, developing others, visioning, goal setting, leading, modeling, team building, and shared decision-making) to be assessed with five to ten descriptors for each label on a seven point Likert-type scale based on the characteristics provide by Spears and Lawrence (2002). The study resulted in acceptable levels of reliability based on the alpha scores (0.94 for the twelve categories). The servant leadership model is one method to bring about individual and organizational change. There are other approaches as well, such as action learning.

**Action learning approach: Challenge courses.** O'Neil and Marsick (2009) described action learning as an approach to developing individuals who use work on an actual project for the process of learning. Revans introduced action learning during the 1940s when he encouraged small groups of people to meet and discuss their experiences (as cited in Young, Nixon, Hinge, et al., 2010). The experiences led to group questioning about best practices and conflict resolution. The intent was to have everyone learn from each other's experiences so everyone benefited.

While there are other ways to illustrate the action learning approach, challenge course programming is one example. Action learning is learning by doing; challenge courses are just that. Participants learn as they complete tasks along the way to achieve predetermined goals. Challenge courses and programing have been modified to accommodate different settings and used for different types of trainings. Challenge courses have been used in several environments such as nonprofit, corporate, educational, therapeutic, developmental, and recreational (Smith,

Strand & Bunting, 2002).

Even though challenge courses have been used in many settings, they provide an opportunity for similar programming outcomes. Involvement of group members in accomplishing a goal is a common result of participating (Gillis & Speelman, 2008). Individuals learn skills and competencies while out on course. Challenge courses have been studied about the impact on group dynamics. Therefore, many universities have incorporated challenge courses into their campus recreational programs (Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002).

Gillis and Speelman (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 44 studies investigating the effectiveness of challenge course programming on various aged participants. The researchers determined that challenge courses were an effective tool for a range of goals such as communication, teamwork, and group commitment involving middle school, high school, university, and adult populations. These populations received benefits from participating in challenge course programming.

**Challenge course outcomes and facilitation.** Challenge courses provide an opportunity to achieve a variety of goals, leadership being one of them. For example, challenge courses have been investigated for group cohesion (Glass & Benshoff, 2002), moral reasoning (Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002), and ethical reasoning (Goltz & Hietpolo, 2006). Many of the researched outcomes of challenge courses have shown an increase in the development of those measures.

Within the last decade, there has been a focus on finding the impact of challenge course programming on college-age participants (Goltz & Hietpolo, 2006). For example, Smith, Strand, and Bunting (2002) observed a positive effect on moral and ethical reasoning among college students who participated in a 15-week challenge course program. Further research has been conducted on work efficacy, leadership, and long term effects with participation in challenge

course programming among college-age participants (Hatch & McCarthy, 2005; Odello, Hill, & Gomez, 2008). These qualities were found to provide an opportunity for development of college-aged participants.

Literature on challenge course outcomes has focused on participants or learning outcomes of participation. However, a critical part to further understand challenge courses is to review the role of the facilitator. Facilitators are a catalyst for success or failure when executing a challenge course program.

According to Thomas (2010), a facilitator is commonly referred to as a neutral individual who manages a group to help members achieve predetermined goals. The facilitators are deemed neutral because they are not a part of the group, but act as mediators to help the participants through the program. The facilitator is responsible for participant safety and teaching skills relevant to the groups' needs to accomplish their goals. For example, for a goal of communication, the facilitator would connect pieces of knowledge regarding effective communication practices throughout the program. The facilitator will do this to mentor the participants about best practices. In turn, the group will respond by acting upon those pieces of knowledge to achieve their goals.

There are five common roles that facilitators assume: facilitator, facilitative consultant, facilitative coach, facilitative trainer, and facilitative leader (Thomas, 2010). The facilitator roles, based on the roles categorized by Thomas (2010), are defined by the individual's neutrality in executing the program. The facilitator is viewed as a neutral individual to the group participating in the challenge course program. No matter what role the facilitator takes, they have an important role in enhancing the development of participants through the challenge course experience.

At many universities student employees fulfill the role of facilitator in challenge course

campus recreation departments. This is a large responsibility for students at a critical time in their personal development as young adults. An investigation of whether students are developing servant leadership skills through becoming a challenge course facilitator would provide many benefits for the academic world as well as practitioners in the field.

## **Methodology**

The researcher for this study used a semi-structured interview with 14 informants to determine if key concepts of servant leadership developed through participation in a challenge course training program, which include an apprenticeship period. The intent was to conduct semi-structured interviews with each student employee after he or she completed the apprenticeship.

**Setting and the challenge course apprenticeship program.** The setting for this study was a large public university located in the southeastern United States. Specifically, the setting was with the Department of Campus Recreation and their Leadership and Team Training program. The Assistant Director of Leadership and Team Training (AD) partnered with the researcher to implement the study. Among many other duties, this individual was responsible for hiring staff and training student employees as challenge course facilitators. The AD was responsible for multiple locations where programming could take place.

The apprenticeship program used two different locations for challenge course facilitation and training. The first site included an alpine tower and an area consisting of twenty low challenge course elements. The alpine tower was a 50-foot tall climbing structure that included hanging elements, cargo nets, ropes, and various platforms. The second site included a high ropes course that was utilized for group challenges 45-50 feet in the air, and included a zip line.

The apprenticeship program was an interactive training process developed by the Assistant Director of Leadership and Team Training (AD). The purpose of the program was to

take individuals who had potential for a paid position facilitator position and train them until they were skilled enough to become independent challenge course facilitators. The AD provided the initial training session for all facilitators. Then, other facilitators (individuals who previously completed the apprenticeship program) served as mentors for the apprentices. The first lesson all apprentices learned was course safety. The AD explained the risks and safety procedures for each programming site. Apprentices were issued the Facilitator Manual and Activity book, and were responsible for knowing and following all protocols by the time they attempted to “check off” and lead challenge courses as a full time facilitator. The “check off” was the final step in the process to determine course competency. The initial facilitator workshop covered basic safety protocols, discussed emotional and physical safety, and proper spotting and lifting. Next, the apprentices shadowed facilitators during actual challenge course programming. Every apprenticeship session involved training and demonstration of safety protocols.

The apprentices learned games, techniques, and skills from the facilitators as they progressed through the apprenticeship program. The facilitators supervised the apprentices in leading a progression of individual activities or games until the apprentice eventually led a full program under supervision. As apprentices began to lead their own activities under supervision, facilitators stepped in and added safety protocols, as needed. Once the apprentice felt confident in his/her knowledge and skill set, they would request a “check off”. During this formal “check off” process, the apprentice was required to lead an entire program while being observed by a facilitator. The facilitator did not participate in the program unless there was a concern with safety. After the formal check off process, the facilitator met with the AD to discuss the apprentice (whether they felt the apprentice was ready to be promoted) and determine if he/she was ready to become a facilitator. The final step in the training program was a one-on-one

interview between the AD and the apprentice to determine if they were ready to be promoted to a paid challenge course facilitator. If the AD determined they had acquired the needed competencies and exhibited appropriate attitudes and outlook, he/she would approve the apprentice for a paid facilitator position. If the AD determined the apprentice was not ready, the apprentice had the opportunity to continue the training sessions and check off at a later date. The apprentices did not receive financial compensation for their duties until they were promoted to a facilitator.

**Population and participants.** The study population was comprised of all student employees in the Leadership and Team Training program between May and November 2012. This time period was identified by the AD as the “prime” time to recruit new hires for the program. This period allowed time for newly hired employees to complete the apprenticeship program and be promoted to a challenge course facilitator. Purposive sampling was utilized for this study. Purposive (also known as “judge” or “key informant” sampling) nonprobability sampling allowed the researcher, based on his judgment with the research team, to invite the participants who were available during the study period (Bernard & Ryan, 2009). Fourteen challenge course trainees were invited and accepted to participate in the study. No incentives were provided for participation and there were no penalties for choosing not to participate.

**Protocol for data collection.** All procedures for conducting the research project were approved by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A and B). In collaboration with the AD, new challenge course employees (unpaid) were identified and contacted by the researcher via e-mail. A date and time were scheduled for the researcher and the participant to meet at the student recreation center. The researcher reserved a conference room at the student recreation

facility for each data collection meeting. This ensured that the environment remained constant for all participants.

At the initial meeting with a participant the researcher introduced himself and gave a short introduction to the study. The researcher informed the participants that their answers would remain confidential and their responses would in no way affect their employment at Leadership and Team Training. The researcher presented a consent letter to each of the participants for their review (see Appendix C). If the participant verbally agreed with the consent letter, the researcher began data collection. The researcher asked the participants if he had their permission to record the interview for analysis later. Apprentices were assigned an identification number using a combination of unique information – the participant's birth month, birth date, and last three digits of his/her school identification number. Then, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview using the same interview guide for each participant.

**Materials.** The researcher collected data by means of a semi-structured interview (see the script in Appendix D). The ten characteristics of servant leadership outlined by Spears and Lawrence (2002) were a heavy influence in the construction of the instrumentation for this study, which was constructed with input from the principal investigator, a professor from the Department of Anthropology, a professor from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, and the Assistant Director of Leadership and Team Training. The interview guide was constructed after careful examination of the literature, including key concepts in servant leadership, action learning approach, and discussions with the AD. The guide went through five stages of revisions and contained six questions. The first question asked the participant to describe any influence from mentors they received during the apprenticeship. The second question asked the participants how the ten characteristics of servant leadership indicated by



Spears and Lawrence (2002) changed throughout the training program. The third question asked different scenarios the Assistant Director identified commonly happen to facilitators while conducting a challenge course program. The fourth, fifth, and six questions asked the apprentices to share their experiences with the apprenticeship program.

The instrumentation was piloted with six current facilitators. The pilot study was tested for internal consistency and face validity, which resulted in acceptable levels of both. The survey was administered after the participants completed the apprenticeship program or after they completed at least four trainings.

**Analysis of data.** The researcher undertook this study from the standpoint of assessing the apprenticeship in relation to servant leadership. The researcher had previously worked for the campus recreation department, but had not worked with any of the apprentices. The participants may have had previous knowledge of who the researcher was from his previous employment. The interest of the researcher was to determine if employment as a challenge course facilitator at the campus recreation department illustrated gains of leadership development. The researcher's interest in servant leadership developed from the department's goals and objectives related to its mission. The mission of the department was developing student employees into leaders.

Each participant was assigned an identification number related to the semi-structured interview. The purpose of the identification number was to keep the participants answers confidential. The fourteen semi-structured interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word 2010 and uploaded into QSR International NVivo10 for coding and analysis.

The researcher utilized naturalistic inquiry as a guide while performing the analysis of the data. According to Lincoln (2007), naturalistic inquiry focuses the analysis of social science research by assessing data beyond tangible or measurable variables to focus on social

constructions based on the research participants. Social constructions explain “meaning making” or “sense making” that humans engage in with interaction with other people. Lincoln (2007) indicated that social constructions determine how individuals respond to situations or events.

The findings of the semi-structured interview were a result of answers provided by the participants. Frequency tables report the responses to the questions related to age, gender, race/ethnicity, influence of mentors, additional leadership roles held, and the ranked importance of servant leader characteristics. In addition to determining frequency of responses, the question regarding the ten characteristics of servant leadership was analyzed for how each individual comment related to the themes. Responses to the open-end scenario questions and the apprentice’s experiences were analyzed for connection to the themes. The unit of analysis for coding was line by line. The researcher determined commonalities within for each theme and probed the intensity of feeling behind the comments. Commonalties among respondents were reported along with any “negative cases” or detracting statements from consensus.

**Themes and data dictionary.** The researcher read the transcriptions multiple times and developed four major themes. During this process, in collaboration with two professors from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, the researcher created a data dictionary to guide the coding process (see Appendix E).

Within the Servant Leadership theme, ten sub-themes were created based on the semi-structured interview instrument. These sub-themes were the ten characteristics of Servant Leadership, which undergird the study. The ten characteristics are (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) stewardship, (9) commitment to the growth of others, and (10) building community (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The themes were identified as codes in QSR nVivo 10 for analysis.

## Results

**Demographics.** Fourteen individuals participated in the study. Of these individuals, eight completed the apprenticeship training program (n=8, 57%). The other six individuals participated in at least four training sessions (n=6, 43%). An even number of males and females served as informants in this study (n=7, 50%; n=7, 50%). With respect to age, 11 of the 14 participants were aged 19-22. The majority of the participants indicated they were 19 (n=4, 28.6%) or 20 (n=4, 28.6%) years old. The rest of the participants indicated they were 21 or older. Participants were asked about their race/ethnicity as part of a companion study; twelve respondents reported their race or ethnicity as Non-Hispanic white, one participant indicated they were Black/African American and one participant indicated they were Asian (n=1, 7.1%; n=1, 7.1%). The majority of the participants indicated they were juniors in academic standing (n=8, 57.1%). All other participants indicated they were sophomores, seniors, or graduate students. Refer to Table 1 for student classification statistics.

Table 1  
*Participant Demographics – Student Classification*

Grade Level	n	% of total N
Freshman	0	0%
Sophomore	3	21.4%
Junior	8	57.1%
Senior	2	14.3%
Graduate Student	1	7.1%

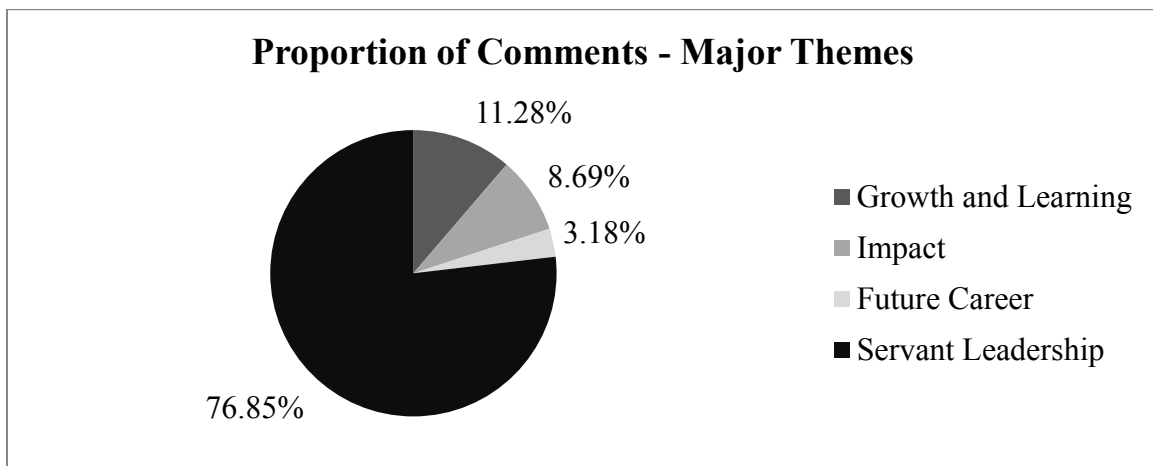
Participants report their majors as nursing (n=2, 14.3%), education (n=2, 14.3%), business administration (n=2, 14.3%), recreational therapy (n=2, 14.3%), recreation and park management (n=2, 14.3%), industrial distribution and logistics (n=1, 7.1%), political studies (n=1, 7.1%), communication (n=1, 7.1%), and sports studies (n=1, 7.1%). All the participants

indicated that they were influenced by their mentoring facilitators (n=14, 100%). In addition, a majority of the participants indicated that they were influenced by the Assistant Director (n=8, 57.1%). With regard to leadership roles held outside of the training program, over two-thirds of participants reported that they had assumed other leadership roles since starting the apprenticeship (n=9, 64.3%). These roles included being involved with the campus recreation adventure center, church, Greek life, club sports, student activities board, Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, and chemistry tutoring center. One individual indicated they received a job promotion at a local grocery store, which they attributed to their participation in the challenge course apprentice program.

**Qualitative analysis.** A total of 851 lines of transcription were coded and resulted in four themes and ten sub-themes. The themes included Growth and Learning, Impact, Future Career, and Servant Leadership. The Growth and Learning theme includes statements from participants describing what the apprentice learned or what they will take away from the training and their challenge course mentors (current facilitators). The Impact theme summarizes statements about how involvement in the apprenticeship program impacted the individual personally or professionally. The Future Career theme described how the training might affect their potential future careers. The Servant Leadership theme includes statements about key principles of the Servant Leadership theory. The ten characteristics of servant leadership were coded as child nodes of the Servant Leadership node.

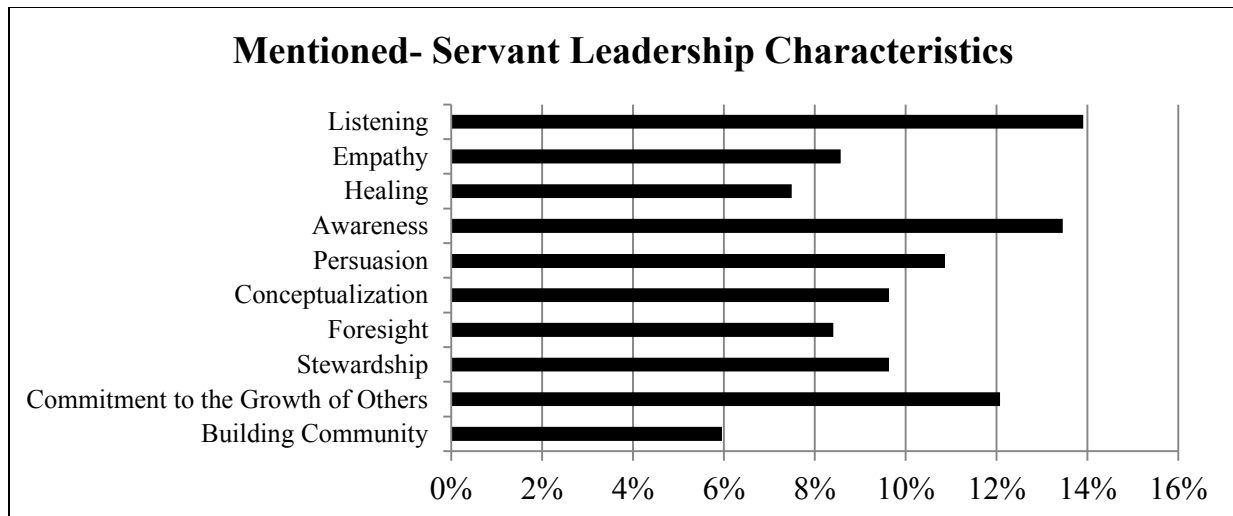
When frequency of codes was examined for each theme, the Servant Leadership theme was the most discussed with 654 lines (76.85%). The Growth and Learning theme produced 96 lines (11.28%) while the Impact theme produced 74 lines (8.69%). In contrast, the Future Career

theme produced only 27 lines (3.18%). Refer to Figure 1 for the proportion of informant comments by major themes.



*Figure 1.* Proportion of Comments – Major Themes. This figure illustrates the percentage of comments made for each major theme.

The Servant Leadership parent node was sub-coded into child nodes, which were pre-identified as the ten characteristics of Servant Leadership. Among these characteristics, respondents were most likely to discuss Listening and Awareness. Listening produced 91 lines of code (13.91%); 88 lines were attributed to the theme of Awareness (13.46%). The sub-codes of Healing and Building Community produced the fewest lines. Healing was mentioned 49 times by participants (7.49%) and Building Community was relevant to 39 statements (5.96%). Refer to Figure 2 for a graphic of these data. The three most important characteristics indicated by the apprentices to be a successful leader were: (1) listening ( $n=10$ , 71.4%), (2) awareness ( $n=8$ , 57.1%), and (3) commitment to the growth of others ( $n=7$ , 50%).



*Figure 2.* Mentioned – Servant Leadership Characteristics. This figure illustrates the percentage of comments made for the servant leadership theme.

The researcher has provided a “snapshot” of each participant to assist in understanding the apprenticeship participants. The pseudonym served as the participant’s name while reporting quotes to demonstrate findings (see Table 2 for Snapshot of Apprentices).

Table 2  
*Snapshot of Apprentices*

Pseudonym	Gender	# of Trainings Completed	Completed Apprenticeship
Josh	Male	4	No
Beth	Female	5	No
Max	Male	7	No
Sally	Female	7	No
Jason	Male	7	No
Greg	Male	10	No
Justin	Male	10	Yes
Taylor	Female	10	Yes
Dorothy	Female	11	Yes
Charlie	Male	11	Yes
Danny	Male	12	Yes
Courtney	Female	13	Yes
Chelsea	Female	14	Yes
Margret	Female	15	Yes

**Theme 1: Growth and Learning.** The Growth and Learning theme described what the apprentice learned or what they would take away from the training, as well as specific lessons their mentors (current facilitators) shared with them. The Growth and Learning theme was relevant to 96 lines derived from the fourteen interviews. Within the Growth and Learning theme, three sub-themes emerged: (1) learning, (2) different points of view, and (3) influence of their mentors. Participants agreed current facilitators were influences on their development.

Apprentices indicated they sought out the facilitators for advice and viewed them as mentors. All participants agreed that they would not have been able to get through the training without the guidance of the current facilitators. The apprentices commented on how the facilitators would do whatever they could to try and help them learn on the course. No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of Growth and Learning.

The first sub-theme that emerged from the Growth and Learning theme dealt with the ability of the apprentice to learn new skills through the apprentice process. Dorothy stated “I learned so much each time from the facilitators.” Jason echoed this sentiment saying, “I have learned a lot more fellowship (learning from others) by apprenticing with this program.” Another training participant, Danny, shared, “I enjoyed learning new things and how to apply them within in the job setting.” Finally, Taylor stated, “While watching the facilitator go through the sequencing of games, I tended to learn a lot.”

The second sub-theme that emerged was how the apprenticeship training program provided an opportunity for participants to manage different points of view, especially since there were so many groups that participated in Leadership and Team Training. Max, when talking about how he learned to adapt to different groups stated, “Identifying and having a more effective way of tailoring a course around a group that you are dealing with was beneficial.” Dorothy shared, “I personally liked to learn all the different ways to lead the groups and how each person is different.” Finally, Courtney reflected, “I think seeing the different ways and things you can do out there to help build people was great. I want to facilitate growth in other individuals.”

The third sub-theme that participants discussed about their approach to facilitation dealt with the influence of the facilitator mentors. The mentoring facilitators were a critical component



to the development of the participants during the apprenticeship training program. Sally was influenced by a facilitator during the training program because she “liked his leadership style.” Dorothy stated, “I can learn so much from observing him [facilitator].” Greg echoed these statements about his own facilitator by stating, “I enjoyed seeing the way he leads. It influenced how I thought I should lead my groups.”

**Theme 2: Impact.** Impact is a related but different theme from Growth and Learning. Whereas Growth and Learning dealt with learning that can be applied to the apprenticeship, Impact addressed more personal and long term professional effects the participants perceived from training. Thus, the Impact theme sought to understand how the apprenticeship impacted the individual personally and professionally; it resulted from 74 coded lines. Three sub-themes emerged after analysis of the theme: (1) being a leader, (2) moving into the future, and (3) self-actualization. Participants agreed that the apprenticeship program impacted them in a positive manner. Specifically, the apprentices indicated that the challenge course training could relate to other parts of their lives.

The first sub-theme that emerged was the ability of the apprentices to be leaders or expand upon their own leadership foundation. Dorothy stated that from being a part of the training program she learned that, “I have the potential to be a really good leader.” Similarly, Beth said the apprenticeship program taught her “how to be a better leader.” Jason learned how to lead different groups of individuals by indicating, “I am learning more about leading younger people as opposed to my peers or people older than I.” Jason also stated the program “provided a different perspective on leading.” Chelsea stated, “I have become a better leader” from the apprenticeship program. Finally, Justin said, “The leadership skills I learned here will help me in the long run.”

The second sub-theme that emerged was how the impact of the program will benefit the apprentices in the future. The participants all agreed the training program provided them with a lot of transferable skills. Dorothy stated, “It [apprenticeship program] gives you skills that you can utilize in other parts of your life.” Justin indicated he had goals and the leadership qualities he learned from the challenge course training program will help him in accomplishing those goals. He stated, “It’s a lot of good stuff. It is not things I will forget tomorrow. I’ve learned a lot of concrete, solid information.” Finally, Danny stated, “The training program brings out a lot of fantastic leadership potential in people they did not know they had.”

The third sub-theme that emerged was that the training program allowed the apprentices to experience self-actualization. During interviews participants admitted that prior to training they were unaware of some of their own strengths and weaknesses. Justin stated, “I’ve learned a lot. Just sitting here talking to you, I didn’t think I would have had all of that (leadership qualities) in me.” Prior to participation, Charlie was not aware of his fears by stating, “I learned that I had a huge issue with talking to large groups of people.” Margret noted her own personal growth explaining, “I learned in the beginning I was not a very strong leader.” Finally, Taylor indicated, “the biggest thing I’ve learned was about myself during this whole process.”

**Theme 3: Future Career.** The third theme the researcher identified was Future Career. The Future Career theme is a collection of comments that apprenticeship training participants made about how the training might affect their future careers; a total of 27 lines resulted in this theme. There were no negative statements reported in relation to the Future Career theme.

The majority of the comments in this theme addressed how the apprentice expected the challenge course training to impact preparation for their chosen career. For example, Dorothy indicated that the debriefing aspect of the program was “huge for me because my degree is with

Assessment, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation.” Jason explained how he benefited from the training program by stating, “I was hoping to learn these skills because I’m going to be a high school teacher. I want to teach and mentor the students that are looking for help.” Taylor also shared her plans to be a teacher. She stated, “All this stuff goes right into teaching. I want to teach them to trust themselves, gain confidence, and all of that.” Chelsea indicated that she was going in the nursing profession, and “I need to be all of these leadership characteristics in order to take care of my patients.” Josh proclaimed he was hoping to work in a federal agency after graduation and “the leadership skills I learned here will help achieve my career goals.” Finally, Josh illustrated how the apprenticeship program had already helped him. He stated, “I received a promotion at Food Lion (grocery store). I’m in more of manager type position now and those skills I have learned in the apprenticeship program had helped me get the promotion.”

**Theme 4: Servant Leadership.** As part of the interview script, participants were prompted to address specific characteristics associated with servant leaders. The Servant Leadership theme described their comments on each dimension of leadership and the relative importance of each attribute in the participants’ minds. A total of 654 discrete comments from semi-structured interviews were coded to the Servant Leadership theme and its ten characteristics.

**Listening.** The fourteen informants provided 91 lines of transcription that mentioned listening. Three focal areas emerged after analysis of these 91 lines: (1) individual and group understanding, (2) effective communication, and (3) evaluating the progress of the group. Participants broadly agreed that the apprenticeship provided them an opportunity to develop their listening skills. They also acknowledged that listening was an essential skill to have as a successful challenge course facilitator. Lastly, they shared that they had several opportunities to

use their listening skills during their apprenticeship. No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of listening.

First, participants described how they honed their ability to understand different individuals and groups by listening. The participants indicated no group was the same and no challenge course facilitation program was ever the same. Max indicated that listening was a necessity, “to understand what the group is going through and how they were reacting to certain activities.” Similarly, Chelsea identified that it was important to understand what the group needs by stating, “I learned to listen more to what groups were trying to tell me.”

Related to listening to clients, informants indicated that listening helped them communicate more effectively with challenge course participants. Sally stated that when you are out on the course, “you have to talk; you have to communicate with each other.” Beth recognized a benefit of listening by stating, “You must have communication in order to have teamwork.” Likewise, Dorothy stated, “Communication is a huge part of teamwork.” Chelsea recognized another benefit of listening by stating, “If you are not listening, you are not aware of what is really going on within the group.”

Lastly, listening was mentioned when the challenge course apprentices were debriefing clients and to gauge their challenge course clients’ progress. Max stated, “Listening allowed me to be able to react as a facilitator to the needs of the group in order to know where to progress next.” Sally utilized listening to “make the participants understand what they have learned and where you can add or take away in the next activity.”

***Empathy.*** Empathy refers to the ability to accept and recognize other individuals’ drives, feelings, and ideas to motivate and encourage team members. The researcher identified 56 comments that related to empathy. One focal area emerged: the needs of the participants.

Participants agreed the apprenticeship provided them an opportunity to develop their empathy skills. The apprentices also acknowledged that empathy was an essential skill to be a successful challenge course facilitator. Lastly, they shared that they had several opportunities to use their empathy skills during their apprenticeship.

Participants described the importance of understanding the needs of participants. The apprentices agreed it was an important to help them being successful. Justin stated it was imperative to “understand what the group needs.” Justin also used empathy to “analyze each activity and make the next activity more towards their needs.” The apprentices associated empathy with relating to the groups individual differences. Jason recognized that “you need to understand that everybody might be put in an uncomfortable situation and you’ll have to relate to them.” Margret thought it was important to “relate to whoever is in the group.” She felt empathy could “make them feel more comfortable and they will get more out of the program if they are relating to it.”

No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of empathy. However, Jason stated, “At this point in the training program [seven training sessions] it really hadn’t developed.” He also indicated, “I need to develop this characteristic more.”

***Healing.*** Healing was defined as the relationship between listening to an individual’s needs, acknowledging them, and making the team members feel understood, appreciated, and needed. One focal area emerged from the 49 comments: it helped get the group involved in the activities. Participants agreed that the apprenticeship provided them an opportunity to develop their healing skills. The apprentices also acknowledged that healing was an essential skill to have as a successful challenge course facilitator. Lastly, they shared that they had several opportunities to use the skill of healing during the apprenticeship.

Participants described how healing helped the group be involved in activities. The apprentices indicated that all groups were not going to be excited about being on the course, but it was their job to ensure they were involved as much as possible. Some participants did not want to participate in the challenge course program. Charlie specified, “One of the parts that I feel is the most rewarding about the program is watching the group come together.” Charlie also stated that through healing, “They [the participants] start to realize these aren’t just games, but they are designed to help you work together as a team.” Justin provided an example of healing by sharing, “One girl came and didn’t wear the proper attire. She couldn’t participate, but I was able to incorporate her as a leader of the group.” Lastly, Sally used healing “to get individuals from thinking like an individual and to thinking they are a part of a group.”

No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of healing. However, Beth stated, “I wouldn’t say that this training has impacted healing, but maybe I haven’t gotten far enough along in the program [five training sessions].”

***Awareness.*** Self-awareness and reflection allow a leader to know their ethics and values and how to react when they are tested. Two focal areas emerged from the 88 related comments: (1) safety and (2) surroundings. Participants agreed that the apprenticeship provided them an opportunity to develop awareness skills. The participants also acknowledged that awareness was an essential skill to be a successful challenge course facilitator. Lastly, they felt they had several opportunities to use their skill of awareness during their apprenticeship.

The apprentices agreed safety was the most important thing they learned. Greg stated, “You need to be aware of the participants for their safety.” Max shared, “Awareness, from what I have learned, is most important in terms of safety.” Beth realized, “People try to push the

boundaries and you have to stand up and make sure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing.”

The apprentices thought it was vital to be aware of the course, their actions as facilitators, and the participants within each of the groups. Sally recognized, “You want to think about what you say before it comes out of your mouth.” Chelsea thought her awareness was important “to see how what you were doing as a facilitator was affecting the other people in the group.”

These two statements contradicted what other interview participants said about awareness. Margret stated, “I don’t think my awareness has been affected.” However, she stated, “I think it develops other people’s self-awareness, especially our participants.” Greg indicated, “I don’t think it has developed, but I can see how it would be developed if I wasn’t a non-traditional student.”

***Persuasion.*** Persuasion challenges leaders to make others aware of their purpose, actions, and consequences of those actions. Two focal areas emerged from the 71 related comments: (1) making the group aware of their goals and (2) motivation. Participants agreed the apprenticeship provided them an opportunity to develop their persuasion skills, and that persuasion was an essential skill to have as a successful challenge course facilitator. Lastly, they indicated that they had several opportunities to use the skill of persuasion during their apprenticeship.

Participants described how they utilized persuasion to focus the group on their goals. Dorothy noticed that it is “easy to forget what the goals are and sometimes they need to be reminded.” Charlie thought persuasion could be used in a variety of goals. He shared, “Let’s get them to understand the short term goal [activity], mid goal [in between activities], and long term goal [what they take away from the course]. Charlie recognized it was his duty to persuade participants to “get the group to the point they are satisfied they came out to the course.”

Participants described how persuasion was used as motivation to help the group. Danny used persuasion to “make them [the participants] motivated and have a desire to accomplish goals.” Greg underestimated his ability to persuade individuals by stating, “I thought I wouldn’t know how to motivate a group to reach a goal.” He felt he was able to accomplish this by participating in the apprenticeship. Lastly, Chelsea used motivation in her skillset to “help get the group enthusiastic and get people excited about accomplishing things.”

No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of persuasion. However, Max stated, “Persuasion is not something I am very good at, but I try to develop it as I go along.” He also stated, “Persuasion is one of the more difficult things to learn.”

***Conceptualization.*** Conceptualization is the ability to “see the big picture”, which is the ability to see all elements of a goal and how it affects other individuals. Three focal areas emerged from the 63 coded comments: (1) adapt in situations, (2) “seeing the big picture” of what they are trying to accomplish, and (3) looking into the future. Participants agreed that the apprenticeship provided them opportunities to develop their conceptualization skills that conceptualization was an essential skill to have as a successful challenge course facilitator. Lastly, they shared they had several opportunities to use conceptualization during their apprenticeship. No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of conceptualization.

Participants described how to adapt in different situations and that unexpected things happened on the course. Max stated conceptualization was important to him because it enabled him “to adapt and not completely fall apart when things change.” Similarly, Danny shared, “Things aren’t always going to go the way you plan it. You got to run with it in order for them [the participants] to benefit from the course.”



The apprentices describe how through challenge course facilitation, the participants understood the bigger picture of what they were trying to accomplish. Dorothy shared conceptualization enabled her to “see the long term goal of what I am trying to do as a facilitator.” Chelsea felt conceptualization allowed her “to see the bigger picture of what the group wants to do and using different elements to help them achieve it.” Justin saw this characteristic as an opportunity to use the course as a progression of knowledge. He indicated, “I see the big picture for the group. I start off small and little by little help them achieve their end goals.” Finally, Taylor shared, “If you are getting too worked up over details you will not see the big picture.”

Lastly, the apprentices described the importance of looking into the future. Sally stated, “I have to look ahead.” Indicating planning for the future was important to her success as a challenge course facilitator, Beth indicated looking into the future by sharing, “If you don’t know what it is going to do in the future, then you there is no purpose of doing it now.”

***Foresight.*** Foresight considers the consequences of actions and ways to remedy problems before they happen. Three focal areas emerged from the 55 coded comments: (1) anticipated safety issues, (2) recognizing individual differences, and (3) preparation as a facilitator. Participants agreed that the apprenticeship provided them opportunities to develop their foresight skills and that foresight was an essential skill to be a successful challenge course facilitator. Lastly, they shared they had several opportunities to use their skill of foresight during their apprenticeship.

Participants described utilizing foresight to anticipate potential safety issues. The apprentices felt it was necessary to foresee hazards and operate in a way to minimize such concerns. Justin felt this was essential to being a facilitator because “The idea of the program is

to solve problems in your head before you get on course.” Chelsea stated, “If someone in the group is doing something that might be detrimental to the group, you must look for that.”

Courtney indicated, “I think foresight is most important for safety since we stress it so much.”

Finally, Taylor self-reflected by sharing, “After filling out an accident report, I thought what could have been done to prevent this from happening?”

Apprentices described utilizing foresight to recognize individual differences within the group. It was important to foresee any potential issues among participants. Charlie felt foresight “helped with group management and being able to keep everyone in order.” Danny sought to use this characteristic “to see where things could go wrong and how I could make this the best possible experience for the group.” Finally, Josh felt foresight could be used to foresee potential issues. He stated, “You have the ability to watch someone, look at what could go wrong and think of ways to counteract this.”

Lastly, the apprentices described utilizing foresight to prepare for their job as a facilitator. Dorothy stated “If I don’t prepare for it (my job), I will be in trouble later.” Justin felt foresight helped him put things in order that were most important by sharing, “It helps me be prepared and not slack off until the last minute.”

No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of foresight. However, Beth stated, “I don’t think I have really enough experience to see that [five training sessions].”

***Stewardship.*** Stewardship holds leaders accountable for the well-being of the group. Two focal areas emerged from the 63 related comments: (1) responsibility and (2) contributing to the success of the group. Participants agreed that the apprenticeship provided them an opportunity to develop their stewardship skills. The participants also acknowledged that stewardship was an

essential skill to be a successful challenge course facilitator; they had several opportunities to use the skill of stewardship during their apprenticeship. No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of stewardship.

Participants described how it was their job to be responsible for the group. Sally felt as facilitator “you have to take responsibility and be accountable.” She also indicated, “If you make a mistake, you must own up to it.” Jason felt as facilitator it was his duty “to be responsible for the safety of the group.” Margret shared the training helped her take responsibility for what the group was doing on the course. She stated, “Since I’ve become a facilitator, I have to take charge and take responsibility of the behavior for the group.”

Participants also described how to ensure the success of the group. The apprentices felt they contributed to group success by providing the participants the best facilitation possible. Max stated, “If they [the participants] achieve anything it is a product of your skills as a facilitator.” Charlie indicated, “It’s your job as the person leading the group to make sure they get the goals they want to accomplish.” Finally, Josh felt he had the duty to “help guide them [the participants] get what they want to get out of the course.”

***Commitment to the Growth of Others.*** Commitment to the growth of others is the leader’s devotion to developing individuals. Two focal areas emerged from the 79 related and coded comments: (1) group commitment and (2) individual commitment to the groups. Apprentices acknowledged that commitment was an essential skill to be a successful challenge course facilitator and that they had several opportunities to use the skill of commitment during their apprenticeship. No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of commitment to the growth of others.

Apprentices described commitment within the group. Sally felt commitment to the group was essential to participant success because “they have a commitment to learning and how far they can go with the program.” Dorothy suggested that groups needed to be committed by sharing, “If they do not have 100% commitment, they are not going to have a successful program.” Finally, Danny indicated, “You will have a much better team or organization when they are committed to their growth.”

The apprentices felt they needed to be individually committed to the growth of the group. Sally felt commitment was necessary so she could yield positive results. She stated, “Commitment is learning about what you do and making a commitment to the participants that are coming out on course.” Dorothy explained it was her job to be committed to developing her skills for the participants by indicating, “If I do not build my skills for them (the participants), I am not committed to developing them.” Finally, Charlie felt it would be evident to the participants if he was not committed as facilitator by sharing, “If I am not committed to leading this group of people, they are going to tell.”

***Building Community.*** Building community contributed to the common good by encouraging others to do the same. Two focal areas emerged from the 39 coded comments: (1) strengthening bonds and trust among group members, and (2) working for something that is bigger than them. Participants agreed that the apprenticeship provided them opportunities to develop their building community skills and was an essential skill to be a successful challenge course facilitator. No interview participants made any contradictory statements about the importance of building community.

Interview participants described building community to strengthen the bonds and trust among group members. Danny stated, “When you are building group cohesion, it gives you an

opportunity to break down barriers.” Sally felt that building community helped “further the participants in their relationships with each other.” Chelsea described building community as “letting the group members build trust for you as their leader.”

Apprentices described building community to illustrate how they, as facilitators, were working for something bigger than themselves. Max shared, “I have a sense for working for something greater.” Josh felt it was his responsibility as the facilitator to convey the message they are working for something great out on the course. He indicated, “If you can get everyone to realize they are part of a bigger thing, they can work on it together and be successful.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to understand if servant leadership characteristics could be developed through a challenge course facilitator training program. Results from 14 semi-structured interviews with student employees (unpaid) who engaged in this process demonstrated that many aspects of servant leadership were central to the apprentices’ experience. The apprentices’ comments revealed a consensus that they honed their own approaches to facilitation by learning new skills and watching their challenge course mentors. They shared how the challenge course training program impacted their personal development and described potential impacts on their chosen professional careers. When prompted to describe how important each of ten characteristics of servant leadership were in their development, the concepts of listening, commitment to others, awareness, and empathy were most often identified by the apprentices. These attributes collectively speak to the role of the facilitator to help others meet their goals (Thomas, 2010). Below, implications of the results in each theme are discussed. The four emergent themes discovered (Growth and Learning, Impact, Future Career, and Servant Leadership) illustrated the development of the participants who went through the apprenticeship.

**Theme 1: Growth and Learning.** The Growth and Learning theme described how the apprenticeship developed individuals' skill sets from observing mentors and learning on the course. Analysis of the interview transcripts suggested that many apprentices went through a developmental change as a result of participating in the training program. This was accomplished through the acquisition of new skills and abilities, working with a diverse group of participants, and learning from the mentorship provided by current facilitators.

The apprentices indicated they learned new skills during the training program and the challenge course was an ideal environment to craft and hone those skills. Even if the skills were already established, the apprenticeship training program by Leadership and Team Training provided the student employees an opportunity to further develop those skills and abilities. The apprentices agreed that the more time they spent on the course and the more facilitation they performed; the greater their abilities as an effective facilitator developed.

The apprenticeship provided the student employees a opportunity to learn to work with diverse groups of individuals. Diversity of clients was not limited to race, age, or gender, but to the different points of view held by the participants of each group who participated in a challenge course program. The training program taught the apprentices that everyone does not process information or learn the same way. The apprentices had to tailor every activity and program to the specific group to help them succeed. Similar to findings described by Shooter, Paisley, and Sibthorp (2010), the apprentices in this study recognized the importance of trust between facilitators and their participants. No matter how different each group was from one another, the apprentices knew they had to build trust between the participants and themselves to be effective facilitators.

Currently employed facilitators served as mentors to the apprentices in training. This element of the training program reflects a key component of the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 2002; Waterman, 2011). The apprentices felt that they would not have learned their skills and abilities unless it was for the efforts of the current facilitators. The apprentices agreed that they imitated the individuals they looked up to because they wanted to be the best possible facilitator they could for the groups participating in the their programs.

All 14 of the apprentices interviewed indicated a growth in servant leadership traits as a result of the apprenticeship training program. The majority of the apprentices were sophomores and juniors. At such a critical time of development for college age participants, the apprenticeship program demonstrated that it can be an avenue for personal leadership development of student employees. Odello, Hill, and Gomez (2008) utilized a challenge course program with a group of college-age students to examine efficacy. They observed an increased level of leadership efficacy or work efficacy through participation. The findings from this study were similar, but focused on and reflected changes in the facilitators instead of participants. Becoming a facilitator could have a longer lasting effect than being a participant because challenge course participation only occurs for one day, whereas the employment can last several years.

**Theme 2: Impact.** The Impact theme addressed how the apprenticeship impacted the individual apprentice personally and professionally. Statements from the interviewees indicated that the apprenticeship affected their leadership development, how they perceived that they would use their experiences in the future, and their self-actualization.

The apprentices felt that they developed as leaders throughout the training program. Each student apprentice began the training by learning how to lead one activity or game and

progressed to the point where they could lead an entire program. Cooper, Flood, and Gardner (2009) and Gillis and Speelman (2008) have suggested that challenge courses were an effective tool for developing team building and communication, which were important leadership skills identified by the apprentices in this study. However, the apprentices shared that the leadership skills they learned not only affected them professionally (it was their job to be a facilitator), it affected them personally, as well. Many of the participants indicated they had become more well-rounded individuals because of the leadership skills they learned from the training and they became leaders in other areas of their lives.

Cain and Milovic (2010) characterized action learning as a process of lifelong learning. Similarly, the apprentices found the apprenticeship program as a process for lifelong learning. The apprentices agreed that the skills and abilities they learned through their involvement in the challenge course program would be something they would take with them as they moved on with their life. The apprenticeship taught from basic skills of proper etiquette to advanced skills of learning how to empathize with a group to motivate them to reach their goals. Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, and Jinks (2007) indicated a servant leader's purpose was to motivate individuals to go beyond self-interests for the good of the group, which the apprentices captured during the training program. They recognized their duty to help the participants went further than their own self-interests.

Several apprentices did not realize all that they had learned from the apprenticeship program until they sat down to reflect about their experiences. Cooper, Flood, and Gardner (2009) examined learning outcomes associated with challenge courses. The eight factors included time management, social competence, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, task leadership, emotional control, active initiative, and self-confidence. After the apprentices



took time to reflect upon their experiences, they came to realize how much they had gained from going through the apprenticeship training program, which included many of the factors examined by Cooper et al. The apprentices recognized the value of the training and all of the things it taught them. The students used the apprenticeship as another source of education from their time at the university.

**Theme 3: Future Career.** The Future Career theme included comments about how the apprenticeship training might affect potential careers. The apprenticeship encouraged the transferability of skills. It was important for the apprentices to make personal connections with the groups that participated in programming. It was also important for them to realize what they were doing benefitted the participants more than just in the challenge course setting.

Several apprentices indicated they wanted to go in the field of teaching. They recognized the value of the servant leadership characteristics and how they could apply them to their careers in education. Similar to Robinson (2009), who suggested current nursing professionals should utilize the servant leadership theory, the apprentices indicated the same could be said for the teaching. Other individuals who indicated other career paths made similar comments.

Some apprentices indicated the training program had already affected their lives. One apprentices indicated they received a job promotion, assumed other leadership positions, or became better leaders in group projects because of the lessons they learned from the apprenticeship. Jaramillio, Grisaffe, Chonko, and Roberts (2009) examined the relationship of servant leadership practices of managers and their influence on their sales teams and found the subordinates to work more effectively under a servant leader. One apprentice in particular articulated this by using the practices he acquired in another position to which he was just promoted. The apprenticeship gave him the ability to problem solve and critically think with his

staff to accomplish all of the tasks needed for the job. The apprentice also shared the importance of serving the other individuals to gain their trust, so they would respect him as a manager and leader.

**Theme 4: Servant Leadership.** The Servant Leadership theme describes the influence of the key principles of the Servant Leadership theory. As a whole, servant leadership development resulted as participation in the apprenticeship by the student employees. The students identified several key components of servant leadership other than the ten characteristics outlined by Spears and Lawrence (2002). The ten characteristics were an important component to the measurement and findings of this study. However, other key elements surfaced from the training the apprentices found to be critical during their development of leadership skills.

The most basic description of servant leadership might be “one’s duty as a leader is to serve first and then lead” (Crippen, 2006, p. 14). The apprentices indicated the purpose of their job as a facilitator was to identify the goals of the groups participating in the challenge course and facilitate their accomplishment. The apprentices served the groups by recognizing strengths and weaknesses of the individuals involved to get the group to work successfully together. The apprentices were not able to effectively lead the group unless they served the needs of the groups. The apprenticeship taught them how to evaluate situations and use their training, resources, and knowledge to guide the participants through the program. Hawkins (2009) stated servant leaders use their resources, training, and skills to help individuals achieve their goals.

The apprentices recognized the mutually beneficial relationship created between facilitator and participant. Greenleaf (2002) modeled servant leadership around “to serve and be served by”. The facilitation process allowed the apprentices to guide other individuals through a program and at the same time it taught them skills and abilities. Even though the apprentices

were making connections for the participants with the program, they were learning just as much about themselves. The training program provided an environment for the apprentices to learn about their own strengths and weaknesses and how to improve upon both.

An additional concept of servant leadership theory is to create synergy within groups of individuals (Hawkins, 2009). The apprentices learned how to do this as a result of the training program. Through their training, they were able to create an environment for the groups to work together. To do this, they assumed many roles such as peacemaker, supervisor, or team builder (Hawkins 2009). Synergy should have been created between the individuals in the group. It should have been created between the participants and the apprentice as well. This enabled them to facilitate the challenge course program effectively.

Stramba (2003) identified specific servant leadership values. These values include innovation, diversity of thought, individual commitment, self-managing, freedom, and accountability for service. Through various interviews, the apprentices shared the importance of the values without being directly asked about them.

Lastly, the major influence of this study was Spears and Lawrence (2002) ten characteristics of servant leaders. The ten characteristics of servant leaders are (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) stewardship, (9) commitment to the growth of others, and (10) building community. The apprentices were asked how each of the characteristics changed during their apprenticeship. It was mentioned by all participants the characteristics were either developed because of the training or the apprenticeship provided an opportunity for them to further develop the characteristics. The aforementioned discussion about Growth and Learning, Impact, Future Career, and Servant Leadership emerged because of the apprentices' descriptions of their

development of those ten characteristics. Each of the characteristics was deemed important to be a successful challenge course facilitator. The apprentices cited these characteristics helped them become better leaders.

## **Conclusions and Suggestions**

In today's system of higher education, administrators are committed to developing students into leaders. Many campuses encourage the Division of Student Affairs (or its equivalent) to accomplish this goal. Many Divisions of Student Affairs, which often encompass campus recreation, strive to promote student leadership development. Within campus recreation, challenge courses offer a key opportunity for this purpose. Challenge courses have been shown to be an effective tool for student leadership development with regard to participants (Gillis and Speelman, 2008; Goltz & Hietpolo, 2006; Hatch & McCarthy, (2005); Odello, Hill, & Gomez, 2008; Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002). However, there has not been substantial research on leadership development through challenge course *facilitation*, which is a role filled by students within many campus recreation departments.

Greenleaf (2002) recognized an obligation to serve also carried the same obligation to be served. This resulted in a mutually beneficial relationship the servant leader and any individual involved with the servant leader. The needs of individuals are of the utmost importance because the servant leader will identify those needs and use their resources, training, and skills to help the individual achieve goals they set (Hawkins, 2009).

Key concepts of servant leadership can be demonstrated through challenge course facilitation. The duties and responsibilities of a challenge course facilitator, typically fulfilled by student employees, include using resources and knowledge to help guide participants through a

program to help them meet their goals. An apprenticeship is a resource where student employees are taught skills and abilities that enable them to accomplish this.

The results of this study indicate that changes in understanding the characteristics and behaviors related to servant leadership occurred for the challenge course trainees. This development occurred to those apprentices who completed the entire program and to the individuals who received only four training sessions. Thus, participation in at least four challenge course apprentice experiences seemed to result in changes in servant leadership.

The apprentices indicated they would utilize the servant leadership characteristics they learned from the apprenticeship training program and apply it to other parts of their lives. The training program affected them by acquiring new skills and abilities, trained them personally and professionally, and used the knowledge learned and applied it to their career ambitions. The apprentices stated they benefitted from the training program because they can take the skills they learned with them as they move on and graduate from the university. Based on the interpretation of the interviews, the research offers several suggestions, outlined in the following section.

Suggestion 1: Develop a training program for challenge course facilitators with the intent of developing the individual beyond the basic challenge course facilitation skills. The training director should explicitly outline the goals they want the apprentices to have as a result of going through the program.

Suggestion 2: During the challenge course training program, utilize facilitators who previously completed the apprenticeship. The individuals were critical to the success of the apprentices in this study. The current facilitators acted as mentors for the apprentices and could empathize with the apprentices in the program.

Suggestion 3: Develop training programs that utilize an apprenticeship program for trainees. The training program was unique in the way that apprentices progressed when they felt ready to move forward in the apprenticeship. The researcher believes this style of training resulted in the success of the apprentices and the development of servant leadership characteristics. No individual learns or processes training the same as another individual, so if the apprentice is in control of their own timeline, they will develop adequately at their own rate.

Suggestion 4: Hold student workers to a high standard of performance with interpersonal and technical skills before promoting them. In this case, the AD would not check off any of the apprentices until each had demonstrated they had a thorough understanding of safety practices, games, activities, course elements (low and high ropes course), and most importantly, the skills and abilities to effectively facilitate an entire challenge course program.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The scope of the study was delimited to one university's challenge course training program and the student employees who were hired between May and November, 2012.

Several limitations to this study were identified. The sampling technique was purposive sampling; thus, the generalizability of the study findings is limited. An additional limitation was the qualitative instrumentation used for this study. The semi-structured interview was prepared by the research team for this study and was not a standardized instrument.

The last limitation to the study is the potential for social desirability of answers from participants. Social desirability occurs when participants answer questions the way they think the researcher wants them to answer (Bernard & Ryan, 2009). To combat this, the researcher indicated to all of the participants that their answers were confidential and would not affect their employment positively or negatively.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

As a result of this study, the research recommends that future research be conducted to further examine the servant leadership development of student employees. The researcher proposes five recommendations for future research: (1) duration, (2) longitudinal study, (3) quantitative analysis, (4) population, and (5) expansion of study.

The first recommendation is to allot more time for apprentices to complete the training program. Due to the nature of the apprenticeship, students were not required to meet any deadlines for completing the training program, progressing through the training program at their own rate. For example, an apprentice could complete the training within three weeks or it could take them longer than ten months. There was a time constraint in which the researcher had to establish a cut-off date for the semi-structured interviews.

The second recommendation is to conduct a longitudinal study with the apprentices. The majority of the apprentices were either sophomores or juniors. It would be ideal to study these individuals from the time they started the apprenticeship through graduation. The ability to measure the development of servant leadership characteristics over a few years would strengthen the findings of this study.

The third recommendation is to utilize quantitative instrumentation to compare the results of this study or a similar study. The researcher suggests using an objective instrument to measure servant leadership characteristics at a pre-apprenticeship and post-apprenticeship time intervals. This would enable the researcher to compare the scores of servant leadership development from pre-training to post-training.

The last recommendation is to replicate this study at multiple universities. There is no standardized training for challenge course facilitators. This could help determine which training

programs are having an impact on servant leadership development among student challenge course leaders.



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## Section II: Extended Literature Review

### Servant Leadership Theory

Many theories of leadership exist including transformational and transactional; however, the servant leadership theory is set apart because it states that one's duty as a leader is to serve first and then lead (Crippen, 2006). Servant leadership theory was introduced by Robert Greenleaf in the essay, *The Servant Leader*, written in 1970. Greenleaf worked as a lineman and then member of management for AT&T between the 1920s and 1960s. His experience with AT&T, coupled with inspiration from Herman Hesse's book *Journey of the East*, helped him develop the servant leadership model (Greenleaf, 1997). The central figure of the story is Leo, who accompanies a group of men on mythical journey. Leo is a servant who does menial chores, but also sustains them with his spirit on their long travel. It is later discovered that Leo is the head of the Order and a great, noble leader.

Greenleaf (2002) modeled servant leadership after "to serve and be served by". It was important to recognize it as an obligation to serve and also carry the same obligation to be served. This allowed two entities to have a mutually beneficial relationship. Greenleaf (2002) wanted individuals to understand it is acceptable to ask for help and to take it when it's offered.

From his work, many components of servant leadership emerged. First, a servant leader identifies the goals that are needed to be achieved. Servant leaders listen and understand the individuals around them. Then, the servant leader effectively communicates and works with all individuals to achieve goals (Greenleaf, 1997).

The needs of individuals connected with the servant leader are of the utmost importance. They are significant because the servant leader will identify those needs and use their resources, training, and skills to help the individual achieve goals they set (Hawkins, 2009). To do this, the

servant leader will build relationships. Ultimately, the trust built will enable the servant leader to lead individuals to a common goal. A primary focus of a servant leader is to create synergy within groups of individuals so every person would feel involved (Hawkins, 2009).

One component of servant leadership Greenleaf developed that he thought was lacking in other models was vision. Greenleaf was concerned that many institutions did not look beyond the current situation. It was important to look beyond today and how a better tomorrow could be created and maintained (Greenleaf, 1998).

Other key components of the servant leadership model are teaching and mentoring (Waterman, 2011). These actions relate to the long-term approach of the servant leadership model, which are to motivate individuals to go beyond self-interests for the good of the group (Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson & Jinks, 2007). Servant leaders want to foster relationships with these individuals. The servant leader should benefit just as much, if not more than, the individuals they work with. The teaching and mentoring of the employees is important over long periods of time so that the company or group will prosper after the servant leader is gone (Hawkins, 2009).

More than just the success of the group, the servant leadership model focuses on equal treatment (Greenleaf, 1997). Greenleaf (1998) wanted to develop strong and effective communities. This would benefit companies by means of prosperity and motivated workers as well as serve the greater good of society (Crippen, 2006). Ideally, every person in the company in this type of model would have input on the goals and the end result would be improved.

Greenleaf (1997) recognized the importance of servant leadership in higher education. For many years, Greenleaf tried to gain interest among higher level administrators to make a more dedicated effort in developing servant leadership qualities among students. He understood

to make a better future for tomorrow, it needed to start with individuals during their most critical development of being a young adult (Greenleaf, 1998).

As a servant leader, individuals are expected to exhibit certain characteristics to achieve effective results. Spears and Lawrence (2002) suggested ten characteristics to describe servant leaders. The characteristics include (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) stewardship, (9) commitment to the growth of others, and (10) building community. The acquisition of these ten skills indicates it takes a variety of skills to be a servant leader.

The first characteristic is the ability to listen. Putting others first requires the servant leader to listen and understand what the person truly means when they are talking and working on the task at hand. The second characteristic is the ability to empathize with others. Servant leaders need to be able to accept and recognize individual's drives, feelings, and ideas to motivate and encourage team members.

The third characteristic is the ability to offer healing. The ability to heal individuals directly relates to listening to their needs and acknowledging them, making the team members feel understood, appreciated, and needed. The fourth characteristic is the ability to be self-aware. Self-awareness and reflection allow leaders to know ethics and values as well as how to react when tested.

The fifth characteristic is the ability to build community. Servant leaders attempt to make others aware of their purpose, actions, and the consequences of those actions. For example, an organization that is influenced by the servant leadership model uses persuasion instead of coercion to accomplish goals. The sixth characteristic is the ability to conceptualize "what might be". This is the ability to articulate a vision for the future in all that it could entail.

The seventh characteristic is the ability to foresee and minimize issues. Foresight resembles conceptualization, except it tries to articulate and minimize problems before they happen. The eighth characteristic is the ability to be a good steward. Servant leaders are accountable for the well-being of the group as they hold themselves and the organization to a higher standard than the status quo.

The ninth characteristic is commitment to the growth of others. Servant leaders strive to develop individuals. The tenth and final characteristic is the ability to build community. Servant leaders contribute to the common good by encouraging others to do the same.

In conjunction with the characteristics of servant leadership, Hawkins (2009) identified roles these leaders assume. A servant leader at any moment may perhaps be a peace-maker, supervisor, or team builder. As a peace-maker, the servant leader could possibly use conflict resolution if a problem arises. Second, the servant leader is also a supervisor that could potentially build trust with co-workers, which would create synergy. Finally, a servant leader can promote team building through encouraging staff members to work with each other.

Hawkins (2009) also identified competencies for servant leaders. The competencies include being visionary, goal-directed, dreamer, trustworthy, and empathetic. Stramba (2003) also identified specific servant leadership values. These values included innovation, diversity of thought, individual commitment, self-managing, freedom and accountability for service, teaching and learning as central issues, embracing risk, staying personal, and courage. A trend emerges when discussing aspects of servant leadership because similar attributes appear. The ten characteristics, roles, competencies, and values of servant leaders could be viewed as overlapping. More importantly, not one aspect is valued more than another; instead, they all have a strong connection to each other and the servant leadership model.



As previously stated, there are several different types of theories related to leadership. Over the last ten to twenty years, servant leadership has become popular among researchers and academic scholars (Crippen, 2006). However, the antecedents of popularity among servant leadership theory closely resemble elements from transformational and transactional leadership theory.

Transformational leaders were described by Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino (1991) as individuals who stimulate followers. The researchers identified it is the duty of a transformational leader to stimulate their followers through actions and resources to achieve goals. Avolio et al. identified four characteristics of transformational leadership. The characteristics include (1) idealized influence (2) inspirational motivation (3) intellectual stimulation (4) individual consideration. These four characteristics describe how transformational leaders could potentially engage individuals to follow the strategy set forth by the organization.

Similar to Avolio et al. (1991), Smith, Montagno, and Kuzmenko (2004) described a transformational leader in the context of inspiration. The researchers indicated a transformational leader inspired followers to a shared goal, empowers them to achieve the goal, and provides resources for personal development. Smith et al. (2004) also described transformational leaders as role models for the individuals they are trying to inspire. There are aspects of transformational leadership theory that are thought to influence servant leadership theory.

Transactional leaders were described by Bass and Avolio (1990) as facilitators who identify roles and tasks for individuals when trying to achieve goals. The transactional leaders describe and clarify expectations of the individuals, which could provide motivation to complete the task. The individuals are not expected to do more or less than what role the facilitator

provides them, but the encouragement builds confidence within the individual to complete the task.

Smith et. al (2004) recognized transactional leadership as a process of exchange between followers and leaders that involve action-reward transactions. The transactional leader states expectations and goals. At that point, the leader can hopefully guide individuals to achieve success. The followers will receive feedback as the process goes along and the transactional leader will hopefully provide opportunities for the individual to learn and develop.

There are qualities of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership theory that are similar. One theory can typically build off another in certain aspects. For example, transformational and servant leadership theory both value empowering other individuals to meet their goals. Another example, transactional and servant leadership theory both guide individuals by using resources the leader has to teach and mentor them. Still, each theory forms its own unique perspective of leadership. The common ideology for all three theories is thought to effectively develop individuals to achieve organizational, team, or individual goals.

### **Servant Leadership Outcomes**

The outcomes of servant leadership have been researched in a variety of settings. Jaramillio, Grisaffé, Chonko, and Roberts (2009) examined the relationship of servant leadership practices of managers and their influence on their sales teams. Responses were collected from a 501 full time salespersons from different industries via an online survey that measured seven dimensions of servant leadership. Researchers identified servant leadership to have a core principle that all people have worth within the company, especially the sales professionals. It was identified that senior managers who had similar characteristics to these servant leadership principles effectively communicated with their subordinates. This was thought to lead to a more

effective and engaged worker. The researchers concluded managers who integrated servant leadership principles into their organizations led to higher sales for the company. This was accomplished by creating a workforce who focused on the needs of customers, and creating higher levels of well-being among the sales professionals.

Whereas Jaramillio et al. (2009) focused on full-time sales professionals, Robinson (2009) sought to understand the servant leadership theory and its relationship with the methods of teaching nursing. The researcher compared the ten characteristics of leadership developed by Spears and Lawrence (2002) to the application of teaching in nursing. Results illustrated that there was a negative impression among nursing professionals; they felt that the servant leadership principles would lead to being viewed as a “doormat” and lacking self-respect. However, to counteract this thought process, the researcher suggested the servant leadership theory must be viewed as empowering. Robinson (2009) suggested current nursing professionals should review strategies of organizations who implemented servant leadership because it would be beneficial to the teaching of nursing professionals.

Chung, Jung, Kyle, and Petrick (2010) explored the antecedents of job satisfaction of full time U.S. National Park Service employees who with servant leaders. The researchers hypothesized trust in the leader and leader support would bring about procedural justice. For the purposes of this study, procedural justice was the perception of what the employees thought was fair job treatment from supervisors (Chung et. al, 2010). The researchers found that a combination of trust in leader, leaders support, and procedural justice enhanced job satisfaction among the 221,479 respondents

### **Assessing Servant Leadership Characteristics**

The creation of an instrument to measure servant leadership attributes has not been

standardized because there is a fear among researchers that operationalizing it runs the risk of demeaning the value of the theory (Spears, 1998). The other issue with standardizing an instrument to measure servant leadership is that the theory can be interpreted in many different ways. For instance, Graham (1991) conceptualized servant leadership into four classifications, Spears and Lawrence (2002) identified servant leadership with ten characteristics, Barbuto and Wheeler (2002) identified servant leadership with eleven characteristics.

After identifying the characteristics of servant leadership, Page and Wong (2000) developed a conceptual framework for measuring servant leadership. The researchers acknowledged servant leadership theory had beneficial impact on people and was growing in popularity among institutions and organizations. In their opinion, in order to become a sustainable, lasting theory, a reliable and valid instrument needed to be constructed to measure servant leadership.

Page and Wong (2000) created a self-assessment of servant leadership that could be used in different settings. Based on the concept of the Campbell Leadership Index, the researchers generated 200 items that were one sentence descriptors of the servant leadership. The literature that was the biggest influence for creating and labeling the group of descriptors was Spears and Lawrence's (2002) ten characteristics of servant leadership. The second step of their instrument construction was to eliminate redundant descriptors, which reduced the number of the items to 100. In total, the researchers created twelve distinct categories to be assessed with five to ten descriptors for each label on a seven point Likert scale. The twelve categories included: Integrity, Humility, Servanthood, Caring for Others, Empowering Others, Developing Others, Visioning, Goal Setting, Leading, Modeling, Team Building and Shared Decision Making.

Page and Wong (2000) calculated the  $\alpha^2$  values for each label and its subsequent

descriptors. The alpha coefficients were as follows: Total (0.937), Integrity (0.796), Humility (0.656), Servanthood (0.761), Caring for Others (0.714), Empowering Others (0.765), Developing Others (0.916), Visioning (0.569), Goal-Setting (0.768), Leading (0.837), Modeling (0.763), Team-Building (0.815) and Shared Decision Making (0.802). The results were encouraging because an alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher indicates acceptable levels of reliability. The researchers suggested the items that did not have a 0.70 or higher level had to be re-evaluated for future research.

After reviewing Page and Wong's (2000) attempt to create a self-assessment of servant leadership instrument, Tucci and Cooper (2013) applied it to a different setting. The researchers modified the one sentence descriptors to reflect duties performed by challenge course facilitators. Tucci and Cooper (2013) reduced the number of descriptors from 100 to 60 with five sentences for each of the twelve categories to be measured. Then, they utilized the modified self-assessment of servant leadership instrument to pilot test whether there was a change in students who went through an apprenticeship in order to become a challenge course facilitator. The pre-test was conducted before the apprentices conducted their first training sessions. The post-test was conducted after the apprentices completed the training program. There were a total of 14 participants in the study.

The student employees who completed the apprenticeship program demonstrated a change in servant leadership characteristics for each characteristic at the post-test time interval. Integrity increased by 0.35 from pre-test mean (6.31) to post-test mean (6.66). Humility increased by 0.70 from pre-test mean (5.17) to post-test mean (5.87). Servanthood increased by 0.55 from pre-test mean (5.81) to post-test mean (6.36). Caring for Others increased by 0.24 from pre-test (6.40) to post-test (6.64). Empowering Others increased by 1.03 from pre-test mean

(5.43) to post-test mean (6.46). Developing Others increased by 0.63 from pre-test mean (5.97) to post-test mean (6.60). Visioning increased by 1.03 from pre-test mean (5.30) to post-test mean (6.36). Goal Setting increased by 0.61 from pre-test mean (5.66) to post-test mean (6.27). Leading increased by 0.87 from pre-test mean (5.40) to post-test mean (6.27). Modeling increased by 0.80 from pre-test mean (5.74) to post-test mean (6.54). Team-Building increased by 0.87 from pre-test mean (5.44) to post-test mean (6.31). Shared Decision-Making increased by 0.91 from pre-test mean (5.63) to post-test (6.54). All comparisons except Integrity and Caring for Others were significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

### **Action Learning Approach**

In addition to servant leadership, action learning is used as a way to bring about organizational change (O'Neil and Marsick, 2009). O'Neil and Marsick (2009) described action learning as a process that leads to learning. Revans introduced action learning during the 1940s when he encouraged small groups of people to meet and discuss their experiences (Young, Nixon, Hinge, et al., 2010). The experiences could lead to group questioning about best practices and conflict resolution. Revans wanted everyone to benefit and to learn from each other's experiences, which lead to a result in an improvement in job performance.

Grzybowski (2008) examined action learning as a cyclical process for problem resolution in the management of business records. A group of workers examined an issue or problem, defined it, and drew upon current ideas on solving the issue. Next, the group of individuals designed actions to change the issue. The group agreed upon the new theory and implemented the change. Finally, the group would reflect to see if the actions taken were beneficial for the company. Hypothetically, each individual in the process would bring a new perspective to the issue and by means of action learning the group would benefit over the course of time.

Gryzbowski (2008) recognized action learning as a never ending process, as did Cain and Milovic (2010), who characterized action learning as a process of lifelong learning for educators. The researchers noted that action learning was a valuable tool in continual professional development. The researchers suggested professors wanted to continually improve their teaching methods. From the study, professors were encouraged to reflect upon their actions and strategize with other professors about ways to improve. Afterwards, a more confident, informed educator was developed. The beneficial effects of action learning in educational settings included teachers' understanding, practices and morale (Cain & Milovic, 2010).

### **Challenge Course Programming**

While there are other ways to illustrate the action learning approach, challenge course programming is an exemplary means to do so. Action learning is learning by doing; challenge courses are just that. Initially, challenge courses were used by the military as training obstacles for soldiers (Gillis & Speelman, 2008). Since then, challenge courses have been modified to accommodate different settings and used for different types of trainings. Challenge courses can be generalized into two different categories: low courses and high courses (Gillis & Speelman, 2008).

Both low and high challenge courses have been used in many capacities such as: non-profit settings, corporate settings, educational settings, therapeutic settings, developmental settings, and recreational settings (Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002). Involvement of group members in accomplishing a goal is a common result of programming (Gillis & Speelman, 2008). Individuals also learn certain skills and competencies. The researchers perceived challenge courses to have an impact on group dynamics and working on goal achievement. Therefore, many universities have incorporated challenge courses in their recreational

departments (Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002).

Cooper, Flood, and Gardner (2009) examined learning outcomes associated with challenge course programming. A total of 57 college age students responded to a 24-item Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ-H) immediately before and upon completion of a one day program. For the purposes of the study, life effectiveness skills were described as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of human functioning. The eight factors include time management, social competence, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, task leadership, emotional control, active initiative, and self-confidence. The researchers found female students who participated in the challenge course exhibited an increase of life effectiveness skills from pre to post test in all eight LEQ Factors. However, the study indicated male students only exhibited an increase in one of the life effectiveness skills, which was time management.

Gillis and Speelman (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of forty-four studies investigating the effectiveness of challenge course programming on various aged participants. The researchers determined that challenge courses were an effective tool for impacting a variety of subjects. The researchers suggested challenge course programming was effective for middle school, high school, university, and adult populations.

Likewise, Cooper, Flood, and Gardner (2009) and Gillis and Speelman (2008) suggested challenge courses were an effective tool for team building and communication. From there, another outcome of challenge course programming researched was participant perceptions. Wolfe and Dattilo (2006) explored the perceptions of adults who attended a one day challenge course program. The program was designed to facilitate communication among 16 adults employed by a dental office. The participants were observed by the researchers and then they participated in two rounds of interviews after the course was over. Participants felt that the



course was effective in improving communication when the activities required group dynamics. The participants responded positively when they were faced with challenges involving group interaction and strategy formulation that required them to talk to each other. Overall, the researchers found that the individuals perceived that participation in the challenge course helped them to communicate more effectively.

### **Challenge Course Programming Outcomes**

Through challenge course programming, there have been several researched outcomes beyond leadership. Some of those outcomes related to leadership development, while others related to group building, morals, and ethics. For example, low and high ropes courses have been tested for group cohesion, moral reasoning, and ethical reasoning (Glass & Benshoff, 2002; Goltz & Hietpolo, 2006; Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002).

Glass and Benshoff (2002) explored challenge course experiences among adolescents. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of participation on adolescents' perceptions of group cohesion. A total of 167 respondents took a pre and post test survey after completing activities in a low-element challenge course program. The survey administered was the Group Cohesion Evaluation Questionnaire (GCEQ), which was created specifically for this study. At the end of the program, the researchers concluded that participation in the activity led to increased levels of group cohesion. The focus of group discussions during and after the challenge course experience led to greater levels of communication among the groups members as well.

Whereas Glass and Benshoff (2002) explored group cohesion, another researched outcome of challenge course programming was ethics. Goltz and Hietpelo (2006) examined the outcomes of challenge courses on business organization members. The researchers sought to use a challenge course as a tool for promoting individual and group ethics. The researchers purposely

had activities with few rules and difficult activities that had many rules to follow. Then, data was collected during the debriefing process when participants reflected upon their experiences throughout the activities. Goltz and Hietpelo (2006) found challenge course programming led to a development of self-awareness. The ethics piece of the programming provided the team opportunity to make ethical choices with each set of activities. The researchers suggested that challenge courses were an effective tool in evaluating ethical and unethical behavior.

Similar to the Goltz and Hietpelo's (2006) research, Smith, Strand, and Bunting (2002) examined the influence of challenge course participation on moral and ethical reasoning among 196 university students over the course of a 15-week outdoor adventure program. The researchers separated the participants into a control and experimental group. Next, they were administered Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT) at pre and post-test time intervals. The researchers used self-reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving activities to determine how the participants came to a moral or ethical decision. As a result of the study, it was determined that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group at the post test level. The experience of challenge course programming led to a positive influence of ethical and moral reasoning among university students (Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002).

### **Outcomes of Challenge Course Programming and College Age Participants**

Over the years, there has been a focus on determining the impact of challenge course programming on college-age participants (Goltz & Hietpolo, 2006). Gillis and Speelman (2008) indicated in their meta-analysis that college age participants were positively affected by challenge course programming. Coupled with emphasis on student development, challenge courses are being implemented in campus recreation departments. Smith, Strand, and Bunting (2002) found a positive effect on moral and ethical reasoning among college students who

participated in a 15-week challenge course program. Further research has been conducted on work efficacy, leadership, and long term effects with participation in challenge course programming (Odello, Hill, & Gomez, 2008; Hatch & McCarthy, 2005).

Odello, Hill, and Gomez (2008) utilized a four-hour challenge course program and selected a group of 43 college age students. The purpose of the research was to identify any increased levels of leadership efficacy or work efficacy through participation. The researchers compared the efficacy of both qualities in a pre-test and a post-test survey, which was developed for this particular study. After the immediate post-test, a follow up test was given six weeks after the participation in the challenge course programming. The researchers found a significant positive effect on leadership and work efficacy from the pre-test to the post-test. The researchers also noted there was an increase from pre-test to the post-test conducted six weeks after completing the challenge course. From this study, it can be recommended that challenge course participation can lead to positive effects on college students.

Hatch and McCarthy (2005) examined the long term effect of group functioning among members of college student organizations and their participation in a half-day, low-element challenge course program. The researchers recruited 76 university students for the study. Similar to the previous study by Odello, Hill, and Gomez (2008), Hatch and McCarthy (2005) tested the college students at different time intervals before and after participation. There was a pre-test from one week prior to participation, pre-test right before participation, post-test immediately after participation, and a follow up post-test two months after participation. Hatch and McCarthy (2005) examined levels of group cohesion, group effectiveness, and individual effectiveness within the group. The researchers found there was no change from the pre-test a week before to immediately before participation. There were increased levels of group cohesion, group

effectiveness, and individual effectiveness within the group from the immediate pretest to the posttest, but there was no significant measure from the pre-test to the post-test two months after participation (Hatch & McCarthy, 2005). The researchers concluded that college students developed significant increases of group cohesion, group effectiveness, and individual effectiveness within in the group after participation in challenge course programming, but there were no long term effects.

### **Challenge Course Facilitation**

The literature reviewed thus far has related to challenge courses focused on participants or learning outcomes of participation. However, a critical part to understand further challenge courses and how they impact individuals is to review the role of the facilitator. Facilitators are a catalyst for success or failure when executing a program (Thomas, 2010). It should be noted that facilitators are present in a myriad of outdoor and adventure education activities; they are not exclusive to challenge courses.

According to Thomas (2010), a facilitator is commonly referred to as a neutral individual who manages a group to help them achieve predetermined goals and objectives. The facilitator is responsible for participant safety as well as teaching skills relevant to the groups' predetermined goals (Thomas, 2010). For example, in a group goal of communication, the facilitator will insert pieces of knowledge regarding effective communication practices. The facilitator will do this to mentor the participants about best practices in hopes that the group will respond by acting upon those pieces of knowledge and meet their goals.

There are five common roles that facilitators assume: facilitator, facilitative consultant, facilitative coach, facilitative trainer, and facilitative leader (Thomas, 2010). The researcher indicated the facilitator role is defined by the individual's neutrality in executing the program.

The facilitator is neutral to minimize the opportunity to influence the decision making of the group. The facilitative consultant is a role that is assumed when the individual uses their expertise on a certain subject and conveys the information to the group (Thomas, 2010). The facilitative coach helps participants improve during the activity by making them reflect on their behavior and thought processes (Thomas, 2010). The facilitative trainer role is to help their participants to develop, test, and receive feedback on the new knowledge they are obtaining (Thomas, 2010). Lastly, the facilitative leader is the most complex of all of the roles. The facilitative leader discusses their views on a topic and asks participants to identify any gaps or problems in their reasoning (Thomas, 2010). Then, while guiding the participants through a program, they must identify what might work better and provide an explanation. No matter what role the facilitator takes on, he/she has an important role in enhancing the development of participants and ensuring outcomes of the programs are met.

Stan (2009) identified the notion that traditionally challenge course facilitators are seen as outside of the group of participants. They are viewed as an “other entity” that either controls the participant’s learning outcomes or is in a position to share knowledge with the learner. Stan (2009) sought to explore different approaches to the role of facilitator. Following an ethnographic study at an outdoor center that included a challenge course, it was recommended facilitators *are* a part of the group they help guide through the program (Stan, 2009). The facilitators could have skill sets to offer important knowledge to the participants. However it is more effective when they have a vested interest in the group. When a facilitator is seen as in a position of power, participants may not respond to their requests (Stan, 2009). The observations at the outdoor center showed that when a facilitator works as part of the team, the participants responded better to the instructions that were given.

Whereas Stan (2009) recognized it to be vital for the facilitator to be part of the group while conducting a program, Shooter, Paisley, and Sibthorp (2010) recognized the importance of trust between outdoor educators and their participants. In any setting, trust between the instructor and student is important to build a relationship. Once a relationship is established, the student benefited from the knowledge being taught by the educator. Shooter et. al (2010) found a lack of trust leads to unachieved goals. It was found when a facilitator was honest, calm in a crisis, knew the predetermined goals and objectives, communicated effectively, asked for feedback, made eye contact, and did not show favoritism to one particular participant trust was formed. In order for the participant and the facilitator to have a successful program, trust must be built between the two parties (Shooter, Paisley, & Sibthorp, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

Servant leadership has been implemented in professional and educational settings to help improve performance. Challenge course programming has a history that dates back to the 1940s and has been utilized for the improvement of characteristics such as group cohesion, morals, ethics, communication, and work efficacy (Glass & Bensoff, 2002; Goltz & Hietpelo, 2006; Hatch & McCarthy, 2005; Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002). Leadership and challenge course research have suggested beneficial effects on individuals who participate in such programs (Odello, Hill, & Gomez, 2008). However, a neglected area of research is individuals that facilitate the programming. The literature describes how college students benefit from participating in challenge course programming. However, more research needs to be conducted in order to establish if there is the same effect of positive results among college age students who facilitate the challenge course programming.

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APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY AND MEDICAL CENTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW  
BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**

**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office**

1L-09 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Stephen Tucci](#)

CC: [Nelson Cooper](#)

Date: 4/25/2012

Re: [UMCIRB 12-000825](#)  
Examining Servant Leadership Development within ECU CRW Employees

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 4/25/2012 to 4/24/2013. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
<a href="#">Consent Letter</a>   <a href="#">History</a>	Consent Forms
<a href="#">Interview Post-Test</a>   <a href="#">History</a>	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
<a href="#">Interview Pre-Test</a>   <a href="#">History</a>	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
<a href="#">Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership</a>   <a href="#">History</a>	Surveys and Questionnaires

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

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IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical)

IORG0000418

IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS)

IORG0000418 IRB00004973

East Carolina U IRB #4 (Behavioral/SS Summer) IORG0000418

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Study.PI Name:

Study.Co-Investigators:

APPENDIX B: UNIVERSITY AND MEDICAL CENTER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW  
BOARD NOTIFICATION OF AMENDMENT APPROVAL



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**  
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office**  
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

## Notification of Amendment Approval

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Stephen Tucci](#)

CC: [Nelson Cooper](#)

Date: 11/16/2012

Re: [Ame1\\_UMCIRB 12-000825](#)  
[UMCIRB 12-000825](#)  
Examining Servant Leadership Development within ECU CRW Employees

Your Amendment has been reviewed and approved using expedited review for the period of 11/16/2012 to 4/24/2013. It was the determination of the UMCIRB Chairperson (or designee) that this revision does not impact the overall risk/benefit ratio of the study and is appropriate for the population and procedures proposed.

Please note that any further changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. A continuing or final review must be submitted to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description	Modified	Version
<a href="#">Updated - Interview Post-Test   History</a>	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions	11/8/2012 10:51 AM	0.01

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT LETTER



Dear Participant,

I am a *student* at East Carolina University in the *Recreation and Leisure Studies* department. I am asking you to take part in my research study entitled, “*Assessing Servant Leadership Development among Challenge Course Facilitators*”.

The purpose of this research is to *identify whether East Carolina University Campus Recreation and Wellness Leadership and Team Training develops Servant Leadership characteristics through its apprenticeship program*. By doing this research, I hope to learn *if there is a relationship between the apprentice program at CRW Leadership and Team Training and the development of servant leadership characteristics among its student facilitators*. Your participation is voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this research because *you have been recently hired by ECU CRW Leadership and Team Training*. The amount of time it will take you to complete this study is 30 minutes.

You are being asked to *be involved in a post-test study*. *The post- test study will involve me conducting a one-on-one interview where I will ask you questions about your experience in the challenge course apprenticeship program. The entire process should take approximately 30 minutes during the post test data collection.*

Because this research is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board, some of its members or staff may need to review my research data. *Your identity will be evident to only individuals who see this information, such as the assisting professor and myself. However, I will take precautions to ensure that anyone not authorized to see your identity will not be given access. Your participation in this study will not affect your employment at ECU CRW Leadership and Team Training in anyway.*

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the UMCIRB Office at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of UMCIRB Office, at 252-744-1971.

You do not have to take part in this research and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, *we will continue with the one-on-one interview*.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research.

Sincerely,

*Stephen Tucci*, Principal Investigator

## APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

## DEMOGRAPHICS

1. How many years of higher education have you completed? (Community College, other universities, etc.)
2. What is your declared major at East Carolina University (undergraduate students)?
  - a. What was your undergraduate major? What is your major (graduate students)?
3. Since the start of your apprenticeship training program, have you assumed any other leadership roles at ECU, in the community, etc.?

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS

**\*PROMPT\* - Focus participant to answer questions based on involvement in apprentice training program**

4. During your apprenticeship training program, who would you identify as someone who influenced you (particularly with regard to leadership or working with others)? How would you describe that influence (what did they do or say that had an impact; why do you think you noticed that)?
5. In talking with the Assistant Director, he identified 10 characteristics that he tries to teach or help people develop during the apprenticeship training program. I am going to name the characteristics one by one. Please think about your own development over the course of the apprenticeship program and identify how the characteristic has changed for you since the start of your apprenticeship program.
  1. Listening
  2. Empathy
  3. Healing
  4. Awareness
  5. Persuasion
  6. Conceptualization
  7. Foresight
  8. Stewardship
  9. Commitment to the Growth of Others
  10. Building Community
6. Of that list, which 3 characteristics do you feel are most important to you to be successful as a leader? Why do you think they are the most important?

7. I am going to go over a couple of scenarios that may be challenging for a facilitator. Describe what advice you would give to the facilitator in order to handle the situation.
- a. Scenario #1 (Adaptability): Kris is the facilitator for a group on Saturday. During the week, the Assistant Director sent Kris information about the group and what they wanted to accomplish with the challenge course program. The Assistant Director informed Kris the group wanted to work on communication, but on the day of the program the group indicated they wanted to work on teamwork instead. Kris already had an agenda for the group to help them accomplish their goal of communication. What advice would you give Kris? What leadership skills do you think would be most important for Kris to help handle this situation?
  - b. Scenario #2 (Encouragement): It is 100 degrees, humid and sunny out at the North Recreational Complex during one of the challenge course programs. Casey is the facilitator of a group of business executives who want to go through the Odyssey Course. However, Casey notices some of the participants are not engaged in the activities and seem distracted. The group is not working well together. What advice would you give Casey to help all group members to make it through the program? What leadership skills do you think would be most important for Casey to help handle this situation?
  - c. Scenario #3 (Reflection): Jamie has been leading a group through several different activities all morning. The group appeared to be working together successfully and meeting most of their goals on the course. Yet, Jamie noticed that the group was having difficulty realizing what and how they had learned connected to later activities and what might be helpful back on the job. What advice would you give Jamie to help the participants make these connections? What leadership skills do you think would be most important for Jamie to help handle this situation?
8. During your apprenticeship training program what have you learned about leadership and yourself? What key things would you identify from your experience?
9. What concepts, competencies or skills can you use from your involvement with the apprenticeship training program to make you successful as a leader in the future?
10. Thank you for your time! Is there anything else you would like to share about the apprenticeship program that has made an impact on you?

## APPENDIX E: DATA DICTIONARY

Rules:

1. Code idea only (only portion of the sentence that contains pertinent information)

### **Apprentice Node 1: Servant Leadership (10 Characteristics of Servant Leadership)**

Listening: Listen and understand what the person truly means when they are talking and working on the task at hand

Empathy: Able to accept and recognize other individuals' drives, feelings and ideas in order to motivate and encourage team members

Healing: Acknowledging others, making the team members feel understood, appreciated and needed

Self-Awareness: Personal reflections that allows the leader to know their ethics and values as well as how to react when they are tested

Persuasion: Strive to make others aware of their purpose, actions and the consequences of those as actions in order to achieve an objective or goal

Conceptualization: The ability to see the big picture, to look beyond today and see the future in all that it could possibly entail

Foresight: Considers the consequences of actions and ways to remedy problems on the path to the bigger picture

Stewardship: Accountable for the well-being of the group, because the leader holds themselves and the organization to a higher standard

Commitment to the Growth of Others: Want to develop the other members personally and professionally because it will build trust within the group and result in a better environment for the participants to work

Building Community: Contribute to the common good by encouraging others to do the same within the organization and build camaraderie within the group

### **Apprentice Node 2: Growth and Learning**

"How the apprenticeship/training has developed the individual. What they have learned or will take away from the training. Transferability of skills, what they have learned or emulated from other facilitators."

### **Apprentice Node 3: Impact**

"How the apprenticeship/training has made an impact (personally or professionally) on the individual."

### **Apprentice Node 4: Future Career**

"How the apprenticeship/training might affect their potential future careers."